# Clause, Sentence, and Discourse Patterns

in selected languages of Nepal

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Part III, Texts

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# Introduction

Today, clause and sentence patterns are relatively more accessible to linguistic analysis than paragraph and discourse patterns, just as phonological patterns were more accessible than syntactic ones forty years ago. Language, however, does not consist exclusively of clause and sentence patterns. Coherence and significance in discourse is not guaranteed by the well-formedness of the constituent sentences. If one were restricted to the mechanisms of clause and sentence grammar alone, one would not be able to tell a joke, win an argument, ridicule a political opponent, explain how to bind a book, or effectively interrogate a witness to a crime. These uses of language typically involve strategies which are of a different nature from those used for the construction of sentences.

Sentence grammar as presently conceived fails to account for why one would want to learn a language, to say nothing of how one might do it. Even French, that paragon of beauty, logic, and precision, would fall into rapid disuse were it not for the fact that in French it is possible to curse the butcher, order a pot of tea, congratulate a father on his new-born child, ask the time of day, and win an argument--none of which are exclusively logical, aesthetic, or linguistic activities. Furthermore, the interesting texts in a collection are generally those that involve the speaker in some activity other than that of filling a tape with recorded text material. Language material elicited strictly for the sake of exemplifying a language tends to be extremely dull, sometimes pointless, and as a result, opaque to discourse analysis.

The texts in this collection differ from one another both in the kind of speech act exemplified, and in the degree to which the speech act being performed is obvious to the non-native reader. They constitute a beginning for the study of monologue and dialogue in languages represented.

Special mention should be made of the Sherpa collection. Elsewhere in this report we have included a paper by Pike and Schöttelndreyer recounting a novel approach to the identification of sentence and paragraph boundaries in continuous monologue. This approach involves retelling a narrative, permuting pairs of sentences and recasting the relationship

between permuted pairs so as to leave the narrative semantically intact. Permutations of this sort were found to alter the nature of sentence sequences. The original sequences were typically chronological. The permuted sequences were typically non-chronological. They depended for linking upon other types of relationships, which might be broadly termed logical. Restrictions on successive permutation were found to be associated with paragraph breaks. The Sherpa collection contains extensive exemplification of this experimental approach to paragraph structure.

The Sherpa collection is also the only one for which an attempt has been made to develop a representation for grammatical and sememic structure at paragraph level. In a paper entitled 'Notation for Simultaneous Representation of Grammatical and Sememic Components in Connected Discourse,' in the first part of this volume, Schöttelndreyer and Pike show how it is possible to represent the hierarchical and sequential structure of extended text in terms of the nine-box tagmeme. The analysis presented there is still tentative, but the fact that principled representations of constructions above the sentence are available represents an important development in the Tagmemic analysis of text material.